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“The power of such vast imaginings”[1]: Actors, Spectators and Their Acting Copies in 19th century Shakespearean reception

Gabriella Reuss

“Green cloth down”[6]

1 The idea of this paper, within a larger project, was prompted by two things. The first one is that two decades ago I found a Shakespearean promptbook[7] in the Bodleian that is missing from Shattuck’s almost omniscient *Catalogue*[8] and which proved to be the book of Macready’s 1834 experimental staging of *King Lear*.[9] This production, which preceded the actor’s much celebrated final restoration by four years, staged the tragic ending for the first time, halting the 150-year reign of Nahum Tate’s salacious melodrama. My comparison of the experimental staging of the tragic *Lear* in 1834 with the much lauded full restoration in 1838 concluded with the claim that whatever Macready proceeded to do on the stage or on the page in 1838 was firmly founded on his 1834 experiment;[10] however, it did not reveal why neither of these promptbooks, nor many others in the late 19th century were published. It is reasonable to assume some change in the performing or staging practices that contributed to the gradual decline of publishing the performance texts or promptbooks as acting copies.

2 The second reason that prompted me was that in our digital age we are experiencing a renewed academic interest in theatre-related documents and there are few opportunities to examine what we would perhaps today call work files, i.e. unpublished or fragile manuscripts. Let us resort to mentioning only Tiffany Stern, whose volumes helped shift the focus from the finalized production onto the making of a production. We are fortunate enough to see that this interest now manifests itself, for instance, in the many digitized promptbooks published by the National Art Library of the V&A or

even more by the Folger Shakespeare Library whose Promptbook Collection (albeit for a high fee) is now available online. The earliest forerunners in this field were, amongst a few others, Charles H. Shattuck and G. W. Stone who dealt with or even published facsimile promptbooks in the 1960s. In the 1990s Julie Hankey, Jacky Bratton and Christie Carson started to make these documents available in the Plays in Performance series that has proved highly successful and they experimented with the then new tool, a CD-Rom, too.

"Enter Lear"[11]

3 Let me return to the case of Macready's forgotten production and, in consequence, relatively unknown promptbook. It was to be performed solely on Macready's benefit night at Drury Lane in May, 1834, but the production was so successful that it had to be repeated twice more at Covent Garden. However, the show was soon overshadowed by Macready's 1838 restoration. Decades later, whilst writing up his diaries and memories into his *Reminiscences*, Macready even disinherited his early brainchild in a letter to Lady Pollock,[12] probably, because it did not contain the character of the Fool. The actor's friend, the sharp-penned journalist John Forster publicly blamed the tragedian in the *New Monthly Magazine*: "Ah! Mr. Macready, why did you omit the Fool? [...] We must again ask you, Mr. Macready, why did you omit him? We can admit of no excuses", he wrote, pointing out the main shortcoming of the production.[13] Obviously, Macready found Forster's otherwise laudatory criticism "lengthy and over-done" and his repeated question quite uncanny, as he confessed, "one must feel grateful for his intention, but at the same time it is not easy to suppress the sigh that rises with the wish of 'Save me from my friends!'".[14]

4 In fact, by offering a sensitive interpretation of Shakespeare's tragic *King Lear*, and by focusing on the role of the Shakespearean Fool Forster powerfully introduced and explained the tragic ending to early 19th-century spectators, and what is more, he effectively paved the way for Macready towards a full restoration, which the actor mounted in 1838. Nonetheless, retrospectively, the vain and sensitive Macready may have felt in 1864 that the early, Fool-less version would bring him shame, and in the ominous, much quoted letter to Lady Pollock, he denied the experimental production, saying that "Tate's *King Lear* was the only acting copy from the date of its production until the restoration of Shakespeare's tragedy at Covent Garden in 1838."[15] Indeed, these sentiments could have hindered Macready from turning his neat promptbook into the publication of a so-called acting copy, a routine in the 18th and 19th centuries, – but perhaps the reason was a more general one, related to the change in contemporary stage practices.

5 But how shall we see the value of a performance text which was, like Macready's 1834 one, denied by its creator? And how shall we appreciate a performance text that bears the traces of the hesitation about the Fool, which was, due to the lack of suitable actor, then omitted? Quite possibly, the actor's intellectual adventure also belongs to what theatre critics, historians and even the general public call "Macready's theatre."

6 Quite possibly, the promptbook of the once successful and then rejected production can reveal for us something about the dramaturgical and staging practices of theatre stars and their relation to the Shakespearean text. Furthermore, how did the mere existence of these annotated Shakespearean performance texts, such "vast" but quite ephemeral

"imaginings", either in their finalized, illustrated, edited and published form, or in their annotated, hastily scribbled, unpublished form affect Shakespearean reception in the 18th and 19th centuries?

7 Quite uniquely, British theatre history is abundant in these scripts, consequently the complete exploration of the nature, the publication, the etiology of such performance texts as Macready's one from 1834 certainly demands a larger project. But as these promptbooks and acting editions were written for actors and by actors, it is important to investigate actors' (lack of) motivation in producing them to understand both their coming into existence and gradual disappearance in late 19th century. In the following paper I will speculate about the interaction between the Shakespearean performance texts and those who effectively shaped them, the greatest actors.

"[Aside]"[16]

8 My use of the word 'speculate' is not accidental. I take courage from Péter Dávidházi who diagnosed "an epistemological shift in Shakespeare studies" and proved that these days Shakespeare scholars are symptomatically engaged in speculation. As Dávidházi noted, the verb speculate is less and less coupled with "'only' but, even when it is, it usually comes with the new implication that there are issues in Shakespeare scholarship worth speculating about."[17] The issue "worth speculating about" is the tradition of publishing performance texts, and the impact they made on acting and spectating which appear to me as a uniquely British phenomenon.

9 For quite a while I agreed with Richard Schoch who, in a review essay for the *Shakespeare Quarterly* in 2014 questioned and undermined the general practice of conceiving 18th- and 19th-century British theatre history quite simply as the mere succession of prominent star-actors' managements: true, for those coming from a non-British background a discourse governed by such tags as "Garrick's theatre" or "Kemble's theatre" may seem rigid, alienating or even slightly incomprehensible. Schoch found that the way Russell Jackson concluded his chapter[18] in *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century* was "needlessly flat": "'It remains convenient,' Jackson explains, 'to summarize Shakespearean production in nineteenth-century London in quasi-Victorian terms of progress through an interrupted succession of prominent managements,' running from John Philip Kemble's to Herbert Beerbohm Tree's."[19]

10 Nonetheless, the practice criticized so far was not the work of certain narrow-minded theatre historians, much rather, the result of the combined effects of several factors, such as the long-run system, the bombastically cut and extremely star-centred performance texts (e.g. the rearranged Act I in *King Lear* let the curtain down on the title character's disposed Curse),[20] and a quite special marketing practice, the selling of the play text, of the prominent playhouses. In *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* Tiffany Stern explains how such performance texts used to be born: first the sheer necessity of "theatricalizing" a play for the actual audience gave rise to professional authors who corrected what the "ambitious Restoration amateurs wrote," and later actors, managers and, to a certain extent, even prompters "strongly re-authored"[21] the plays. From the late 18th century onwards, famous actor-managers like John Philip Kemble or Edmund Kean, perhaps following Garrick's example, created their own textual versions. The practice of revising the playtext after the first night sieved the lines and scenes that had worked well and thus the text that managed to reach the

printer was indeed worth keeping. Such a printed performance text, tested on live spectators, was the accompaniment of the long-running shows: these so-called acting copies, characteristic of “Garrick’s” or “Kean’s theatre,” were sold at playhouses and booksellers[22] to lure more spectators and more notably, to lure spectators to the same show multiple times.

“Marked for representation”[23]

11 To clarify the terms: the *acting copy* or *acting edition* practically finalized in print all the changes indicated, or rather, hastily scribbled, in the promptbook. The *promptbook*, in contrast, generally carried all the nuances that happened on the stage, informed the stage manager/prompter about the lighting and stage design and related the lines with the stage business of all the performers present on the set. In a recent video on the Folger Shakespeare Library’s website Michael Dobson[24] introduces promptbooks, as essentially made for backstage use, mainly for the technical staff. The opening of a promptbook, Macready’s *King John*[25] provides the illustration to what Dobson says and helps explain the most frequent types of annotations. Besides the entire dramatic text, the “book” of a production contains the cues, the calls before the cues, and the use of the props and the cues for the backstage tools, such as the rain or wind machines. Tiffany Stern points out that a good prompter who managed the performance just like a conductor would his orchestra today most probably held at least one ensemble rehearsal in order to jot down the timing of the calls and meticulously updated the text, the “bible” of the production.

12 The *acting edition* was intended for the spectator: plates, scenes from the performance with a caption of the relevant lines, complemented the acting copy’s text, and to give a fuller experience to the spectator, the volume started with a cast list and named the most significant artists from the production team. The details of the costumes[26] are often added, even lengthily described, perhaps to help the spectators identify the speakers on the boards; sometimes the costumes from distinguished earlier productions are cited,[27] obviously to claim the famous predecessors’ authority. Acting copies or acting editions are published with a frontispiece that proudly adds, evidently to legitimize themselves, that the text is accurately transcribed from the promptbook, or is printed as it was performed at the time. When we read the frontispieces of either *King John, King Lear*, or *Clarisse or the Merchant’s Daughter* etc, we notice that these editions often belong to a series: *King John* is n° 22, while *King Lear* is n° 41 in the same series, Cumberland’s British Theatre, which cost 6 dimes each. *Clarisse or the Merchant’s Daughter* appeared in Webster’s Acting National Drama series as n° 121 (!) (price 1 s.) “under the auspices of the Dramatic Authors’ Society.”[28] The high numbers and the low prices in the series indicate that such performance text publications, be they Shakespeare or other, appear to have been quite popular on the book market, and also, that performances in the meantime did not change substantially. Regarding these two factors from the angle of Shakespeare’s reception, we may conclude that both the popularity of performance texts and the continuity of performance traditions contributed significantly to the success of Shakespeare’s afterlife in the 18th and 19th centuries. These factors illuminate that creating illustrated editions of performance texts and selling them cheap not only guaranteed a wide readership but generated an equally wide spectatorship, too. It is thus quite understandable why playhouses

considered the publication of their acting copies as a major part of their marketing strategies.

13 "Correctly printed from the prompter's copy," the acting editions fixed much more than the star actor's reading of a drama: they preserved a substantial proportion of the entire interpretation, along with the attached stage business and costumes, for not only one particular production but for many consecutive productions. As Stern remarks, Garrick won his popularity by offering fresh interpretations, reinventing and revitalizing "established characterization", because he noticed that the "inherited roles that audiences were used to seeing" were "tired."[29] Inherited roles were not a rarity in post-Garrick times either: when we read J. S Bratton's Plays in Performance *King Lear* which rolls down the text on one page and runs the stage business of various actor-managers drawn from a series of acting copies on the other, we can see how much the gestures and moves, props and set, were attached to particular lines, and were repeated by generation after generation. When she repeatedly adds to a particular line that it was "Cut by Macready, Charles Kean, and Irving"[30] it cannot go unnoticed that the repetition is not accidental. The fact that these star actors used the promptbook made by the previous generation(s) of actors reveals that even if these texts seem entirely ephemeral, in reality they had lasting influence on Shakespearean reception through repetition and accumulation. Performance texts were seen by actors as the recipe for success, the well-tried, ultimate knowledge of theatrical effect, which was thus inherited and passed on.

"When Lear comes forward"[31]

14 The stable presence of performance texts in popular culture had other effects as well: actors were indeed bound by the "book" to traceably repeat their stage business from night to night, in dozens of successive performances, in the treadmill of the long-run system. In case a production was successful, nearly all other productions of the playhouse were cancelled for a while to capitalize on the fully booked houses of the new spectacle. While the long-run system effectively promoted and also monetized the popularity of an actor and a production, the same long-run system, by the sheer monotony, unavoidably contributed to the actors' (especially the star's) burning out and occasionally, to the slackening of the cast's discipline. Once Macready remarked that a minor actor called Edmonds, once "refused to speak what the prompter told him" which immediately made the dutiful Macready "disgusted with the impertinence."[32]

15 The long-run (as opposed to the repertory) system and the publishing of the acting editions cemented what exactly spectators were to see each night on the stage and what exactly they were to expect for the price of their tickets. For instance, they could expect to see Desdemona stabbed, which Othellos outside the English-speaking world, in the realm of translated Shakespeares, would never do, as translators usually worked from scholarly editions rather than performance texts.[33] The illustrated acting copies carried on the English tradition of daggering the already half-dead Desdemona, responding to her sighs at "Not dead? Not yet quite dead,"[34] even though no word by Shakespeare prescribed the act. Although the first illustrated edition in 1766 depicts the moment of Desdemona being smothered, in successive productions – as acting editions tell us – English-language Desdemonas tend to die by knife, forcefully

demonstrating that 18th-century stage practice can, via acting editions, come down to us in late 19th- or even 20th-century productions.[35]

Figure 1: Mr Young as Othello in Macready's study book (Forster Collection, National Art Library, V&A).

Fig. 2. *Mr. Macready as Othello*, London, A. Park, 1822-1824, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library. *Macready as Othello*, London, A. Park, 1822-1824, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library. The New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1822-1824. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47dd-ed18-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99 last accessed Feb 14, 2021.

Fig. 3. Ralph Richardson (Othello) and Curigwen Lewis (Desdemona) in 1938, Old Vic, V&A Collections, Negatives of Othello at the Old Vic Theatre London, 1938, https://www.vam.ac.uk/archives/unit/ARC69299 last accessed Feb 14, 2021.

16 As for the publication of Macready's 1834 promptbook of *Lear,* after the first few successful performances he thought of turning his promptbook into an acting edition: he "called at Miller's [his bookseller] to inquire about the expense of publishing *Lear*" but then learnt "it would cost about £20, which is more than I can afford."[36] In the meantime he was unable to maintain friendly terms with Alfred Bunn, the manager of both Drury Lane and Covent Garden at the time, who more often than not scheduled him without any prior notice or negotiation, and therefore the actor was unsure whether his *Lear* would be put on often enough to make it worth the investment. Productions that proved successful replaced, or indeed, knocked out, other shows and were kept on, performed in long runs. This gave time to sell the performance script.

17 Even if the publication of the acting copy proved to be a dead end for Macready in the beginning of July, his *Diary* has several entries between July 25 and August 11 referring to the "ennuyant employment"[37] or the "wearying, slow and unimproving task of preparing my acting copy of *King Lear.*"[38] These entries, jotted down in the period succeeding the successful late May première, but before the actor's autumn tour in the country, prove that he, for some reason, continued to work on the restored Shakespearean text and went on with preparing a nuanced and neat copy albeit he must have already had one for the première. For the first night Macready started to prepare on 4th May, as soon as he received permission from Bunn to have *King Lear* as his benefit (a bonus from his employer included in his contract which entitled the actor to pocket the net proceeds of the benefit night) at the end of the month: "set at once to work on the cutting, and then marking fairly the copy of Lear [...] I have finished it, and I humbly hope for a blessing on my work. Amen!" What I imagine is that the copy made on 4th May was assembled in a hurry as it was badly needed for the pre-production

preparations: the first night took place on 23rd May, so it is little surprise that Macready, wishing to share his new performance text with his colleagues, continues the entry pleased and contented, "made it a parcel for Cooper and sent it to him."[39] The "book" of the future production was thus sent from the star actor to the theatre/stage manager to serve as the compass of the production. Of course, Macready had had a draft[40] from which he could study the part, but what justifies the need for the neat version(s) is that he had to cater for his colleagues both in London and on tour.

18 Let me illuminate another function of the promptbook: a neat performance text of the star's interpretation was sent ahead on tour to the next host theatre for the actors and the technical staff in order to enable their preparations for the next night's co-production. Although I have not found this function noted elsewhere, yet it is clear from the numerous posts in Macready's *Diary* that the promptbooks of productions, carrying and disseminating fully developed, autonomous interpretations, were circulating between the major performers and the theatres in the country. When for instance Macready invited Ellen Tree to London to play Clémenthe against his Ion, at her request the next day the actor "enclosed a note in a parcel, containing a book of *Ion*, "which I marked, for Ellen Tree, to Clarke at Liverpool."[41] Once staying in Bath while on tour, Macready jotted down, "made a parcel of books of *Werner* and *Provost of Bruges*, which I sent to Exeter."[42] Apparently, the arrival of the performance books to a city's playhouse could signal the actor's whereabouts: "I had sent back to Willmott [prompter] the books of *Sardanapalus* and *King Lear* by which, I suppose, he [his boss Bunn] learned that I was in town."[43] It could happen that the book, a valuable asset, was not guarded properly, in which cases Macready indignantly complains. On one occasion the sole rehearsal with the touring guest was destroyed: "this prompter had given away the prompt-book during rehearsal for which the rehearsal was, of course, obliged to wait,"[44] on another occasion it was the actor's creative drive that was destroyed, thanks to "the sight of my neat book in the dirty prompter's hands" due to which he suffered "with every turning of the leaves."[45] His sarcastic reports of the playtext preparation, his references to the circulation of the play books and even his grumbles make Macready's journal entries highly important sources regarding the birth, the practical use and the value of annotated performance texts.

"The loan of my book"[46]

19 Such wide circulation of valuable manuscripts, as unpublished promptbooks, naturally triggers the chance of corruption: an intellectual product whose value can be converted to money evidently raises copyright issues. As Tiffany Stern pointed out, this is a question already popping up in the 17th and 18th centuries: to whom do the rights of the stage arrangement belong? Macready's response could not be clearer: "I denied the title of the Drury Lane managers to *Werner* as acted; the alterations are my property."[47] On one occasion he was trapped: an ignorant (?) note from Talfourd, author of *Ion* informed him that the dramatist allowed a certain Mr Morris to play Ion at the Haymarket, "wishing the loan of my book, as marked for representation." Macready, of course, in the next dozen lines immediately commenced to worry about his own reputation, "perceiving the credit I had received partially endangered by the possible success of a performer inferior in rank."[48] While reading Macready's fuming we can

understand how much promptbooks were appreciated as intellectual products within the acting profession.

20 Nonetheless, the worst was perhaps not known to him: that Charles Kean has several of Macready's promptbooks copied and mounted, garnering success without crediting Macready at all. According to Shattuck, it was George Cressall Ellis, formerly assistant to Macready's chief prompter Wilmott, who "provided Kean a copy of Macready's prompt-book and water-colours of Macready's scene designs."[49] Ellis stayed at Drury Lane after Macready's retirement, had access to the theatre library, and with his extraordinary and easily recognisable calligraphy "made for himself a collection of perfected prompt-books, mainly derived from Macready's recent productions. Occasionally too, he transcribed these for other actors."[50] Shattuck made a beautiful calligraphic facsimile edition of the promptbook of *King John* which Ellis prepared at the time of Macready's retirement, and he justly titled it not Charles Kean's (1852) but Macready's *King John* (1842).[51] In fact, Shattuck took great pains to compare Ellis's text for Kean to that of Macready's own, and found that only minor changes were made in the Kean promptbook, e.g. Arthur's leap was not to the right but to the left etc. Shattuck does not accuse Charles Kean of stealth or plagiarism, nonetheless somewhat euphemistically, he calls Kean's copy a "transcript of Macready's promptbook."[52] The case of another Shakespearean play, *The Tempest*, quite tangibly demonstrates the value of promptbooks or performance arrangements. Charles Kean's *Tempest* (1857) was allegedly "a work exclusively of imagination"[53] as his enthusiastic friend, manager, publicist and biographer Cole boasted. However, the "immensely realistic shipwreck scene" which opened the play was not exclusively based on authentic records but rather on Macready's 1838 performance. "We know that Macready cut out all the words of the first scene on the ship, and gave, as Charles Kean did many years later, a magnificent moving picture to start the action and to put the audience in the mood of the spectacle to follow."[54] What Odell's neutral sentence notes as mere similarity between the two performers' takes on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, was in fact a ruthless fight between star tragedians under the surface. Nonetheless, the one who benefited most from this war and many similar cases, was Shakespeare: with the help of already well-tried productions scripts his plays were permanently kept on stage.

"Vast imaginings"[55]

21 To round up the speculations about the roles British Shakespearean promptbooks played in disseminating actors' interpretations of Shakespeare we must deal with the fragmented, operatic nature of the 18th- and early 19th-century theatre performance that promptbooks also recorded and preserved. Tiffany Stern explains the origin of the fragmented performance through the 17th- and 18th-century performers' particular way of preparation. Never having the full text of a play and almost never participating in ensemble rehearsals, "the actor focused entirely on the words in his text", irrespective of the rest of the play, the rest of the cast, and therefore grew selfish on the stage. What they did practise though was "reading [of] a part into changeable passions,"[56] that is, into coded body language.

22 The effects of such generally part-based study were further reinforced by contemporary reliance on the mechanical perception of the human body: emotions were displayed through certain codified postures or poses. The postures, described in

terms of classicist aesthetics, were to be seen for instance on many canvasses as well as theatre stages throughout Europe. Originally written for genre painting, Gerard de Lairesse's recommended postures[57] later reincarnated in several volumes on actor training that suggested, indeed, prescribed certain postures for actors via illustrations. While Aaron Hill's *Essay on the Art of Acting* in 1746[58] mentioned only ten emotions with ten corresponding poses, the number of poses steadily grew. Johann Jacob Engel's book, which was translated and updated by Henry Siddons for British actors in 1822, featured 69 kinds of emotions and illustrated each of them with engravings. Engel's work seems to have been quite ubiquitous in Europe, as even Macready's Central-European contemporary, the Hungarian Gábor Egressy (1808-1866) was familiar with it. Thus the visuals in the books that taught the actors' profession and often appeared in illustrated critical and acting editions vastly furthered the dissemination of this international gesture language. Consequently, the repetition of these coded gestures imprinted a certain way of "seeing" Shakespeare in the minds of audiences. For instance, the plate of "Jealous Rage" in Siddons's book depicts a man who elevates his right arm high to the skies in the very same way Othello raises his hand before stabbing Desdemona on the front cover of Rowe's (first illustrated) 1709 edition, and in Macready's acting copy featuring a late-18th, early 19th-century Othello; or as Garrick in *Lear*, shaking his hand to the heavens on the heath, or Macready raising his right fist with Cordelia's dead body on his lap. Let me add an example from entirely outside the theatre, even from another continent, Benjamin West's oil painting, *Death on a Pale Horse* (1796) to the other depictions of "Jealous Rage" only to illustrate both the theatricality and the ubiquity of the body language that was based on changeable passions and postures. Acting editions preserved the ways actors interpreted and audiences watched the Shakespearean text. By passing performance books from one generation to the other, the presence of illustrations continually confirmed the link between a character and an emotion (e.g. Garrick as raging Lear).

Figure 4: *Death on a Pale Horse* by Benjamin West (detail) (Detroit Institute of Arts), last accessed February 14 2021, https://www.dia.org/sites/default/files/tms-collections-objects/79.33_o2.jpg

Figure 5: *Macready as Lear with Cordelia's Body* (British Library), J. O. Halliwell, *The Complete Works of Shakspeare, revised from the original editions* (1851–53), London, New York, accessible online at https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/engraving-of-charles-macready-as-king-lear-1851-53# , last accessed Feb 14, 2021, public domain.

Figure 6: Plate 36, "Jealous rage" in Henry Siddons' *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action*, https://books.google.hu/books?redir_esc=y&id=iSsLAAAAIAAJ&q=jealous+rage#v=snippet&q=jealous%20rage&f=false last accessed February 14, 2021

Figure 7: Mr. Garrick in the Character of King Lear by James McArdell (The MET), "Garrick in the Character of King Lear (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 3, Scene 1)" by James McArdell, 1761. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessible online at https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/707788, last accessed February 14, 2021, public domain.

23 Besides the part-based studying and the visual tradition of expressing emotions with poses, the influence of the Italian opera on the British theatre scene in the 18th century must also be considered when we try to estimate the influence of actors' "vast imaginings" seen in their acting editions. What the build-up of operas, especially the *opera seria* did was to consolidate the fragmented way of acting. As operas were often performed on the same boards as legitimate drama, one cannot but see the similarity between the performances of the aria-based opera and the soliloquy-based drama, in terms of acting. The *opera seria* genre consists of two separate elements, recitatives (sung speeches) and arias (sung monologues), and of the two elements the recitatives, comprised of the dialogues and thus carrying the action, were generally considered less important. Expressive of emotions and inner struggles, arias were the more valuable parts. Such parts, called "points" by the contemporaries, represented the heights of the show, so much so that sometimes on the audience's demand the points had to be repeated, sometimes ridiculously hindering the action and halting the show. (The so-called *da capo aria*s that restarted after the last note effectively catered for this demand, disregarding the sense of the entire opera.)

24 To describe the unequal treatment of structural elements in fragmented acting I always used the terms of the *opera seria*,[59] and once was pleasantly surprised to find that opera expert Ian Woodfield did the same, only vice versa: he used the theatre's terms to compare the function of the aria to that of a "point", a grand monologue. Both arias and soliloquies offered the same kind of opportunity to the performer: their scores/lines extended the emotionally highly charged moment beyond reality and real time. These extended moments, like Garrick's famous Curse in *Lear*, were seen as the tour de force for the performer and received exceptional quantity of time and attention from both the dramatist and the spectator. Such fragmentation enhanced the sense of meta-theatricality, the awareness of the separation between performer and part. For instance, "the practice of making 'deep bows' to acknowledge every burst of applause" seems to have been problematic: "could there be anything more ridiculous, he [music critic Le Texier] asks, than to ruin the dramatic coherence of character in this way? Even arias are liable to be interrupted by spontaneous clapping."[60] The frequent rearrangement of scenes, the grouping of them into acts for effect are clearly visible in Shakespearean promptbooks, revealing to us that the separate "points" and not the play's dramatic coherence counted most for the spectator.

25 What these images and contemporary descriptions reveal is a certain continuum in theatre practice, characterized by fragmented, operatic acting, part-based learning, expressing sentiments and concepts with poses while remaining quite unrelated to other characters, and relying on the minimum of ensemble acting and ensemble rehearsal. All these are eternalized (and can be traced back) in Shakespearean performance texts: soliloquies receive special attention and are often relocated for effect, minor characters are often suppressed for the sake of the leading actors etc. In this sense the change or even "revolution"[61] that the fast-moving gestures and faces of Macklin and his disciple Garrick allegedly brought still does not seem to be paradigm-changing. When describing "Garrick's theatre" Stern ascertained that even if the famous theatre reformer developed his natural style by the fast pace of transiting from one pose/expression to another, yet his "'new acting' did not lead to new preparation, or new ways of thinking about the text, but was imposed within the old preparation and performance framework."[62] It is a pity that the scope of her book does not allow

Stern to continue with this thread and explain this further: Garrick is rarely criticised on the basis that Stern mentions here.

26 Yet I believe that it would have been impossible for Garrick to swim against the tide and deviate from the well-established fragmented, operatic, pose- and part-based forms of theatre. In a fully lit auditorium where spectators are either noisy or are not taking their seats throughout, only shorter (necessarily eye-catching and bombastic) units like arias or monologues seem practical. Actually, it was this kind of performance that was most easily passed on, learned via self-study, inherited and reconstructed through acting editions and promptbooks. In fact, illustrated acting copies conveyed nothing else but the images of the successful sets of well-known, codified poses, passing on the extremely star-centred versions of the Shakespearean texts to the next generation, eventually firmly cementing both the fragmented sort of acting and triggering the equally fragmented spectating practice.

"Edmund endeavouring to rise"[63]

27 The only way an actor could have broken away from the hegemony of the "old preparation and performance framework" that became so easily fixed in inherited promptbooks, was by attaining a non-fragmented way of acting. Admittedly, the justification of this statement needs a much larger set of data than what I presently have at hand, yet I risk the assumption that we see one of the first attempts at continuous acting in Macready's 1834 promptbook. Albeit lacking the Fool, the actor's 1834 restoration of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in both textual and acting terms does not just "cement" but also innovates.

28 From the promptbook of his 1834 *Lear* Macready seems to have been experimenting with continuous stage business, lack of extemporization, and nuanced instructions at crucial points. The storm, for instance, is very mindfully tuned to each of the Shakespearean lines, the sound effects are carefully lowered while Lear speaks. The example that inspired this article's passages about fragmented *vs* continuous acting is the representation of Edmund the Bastard's death in Macready's 1834 promptbook.

29 The way Edmund is prescribed to die in Macready's script seems indeed remarkable: as a villain in Shakespeare, Edmund is reduced to die off stage. Shakespeare's text denies him the possibility to raise pity towards himself, in short, the actor does not have the chance to respond to the ultimate challenge of performing death onstage. Dying a good death, *mors bona*, is a privilege which Christians often pray for, often central in Victorian fiction,[64] a focal situation which evil characters in dramas usually do not deserve. This is why the fact that Macready has Edmund die on the stage becomes unusual and meaningful. Instead of having Edmund dragged off, Macready arranged the last scene for him to perform some repentance and receive peace. He cut the Bastard's proud part "yet Edmund was beloved" only to focus more attention on Edmund's opening, "I pant for life – Some good I mean to do." He even assigns Edmund a short period of non-verbal play while lying fatally wounded: the handwritten annotation on the interleaved page reads "Edmund, endeavouring to rise, is assisted by two officers."[65] The fact that Edmund is assisted by others garners an audience for him, and it also means that he has the chance of continuously, or rather, repeatedly attempting to rise. He must be acting without disruption throughout the dialogue. The only verbal addition is the practically neutral line of "Oh Gods!", yet this at once

reveals that Edmund, in his last breath, turned away from earthly issues and desires to speak to some deities.

30 It is interesting to see the rare occasion when a character receives so much care and empathy from the dramaturge who happens to be the star of the production. Instead of tailoring the text at all costs in a way to focalize attention on himself as Garrick and Kean tended to do, Macready here shares the limelight for a moment with the other character who, by this short dying sequence, becomes even more important. The star actor's gesture points at an elaborate scheme: for some reason it was important for Macready to keep all, the officers, the Bastard's and Edmund's characters, on the move. The sequence demonstrates that through continuous acting, through remaining in character even when not speaking or delivering a "point" actors still can achieve a lot: through continuous (or even representational) acting they are able to grab and then hold the spectator's attention.

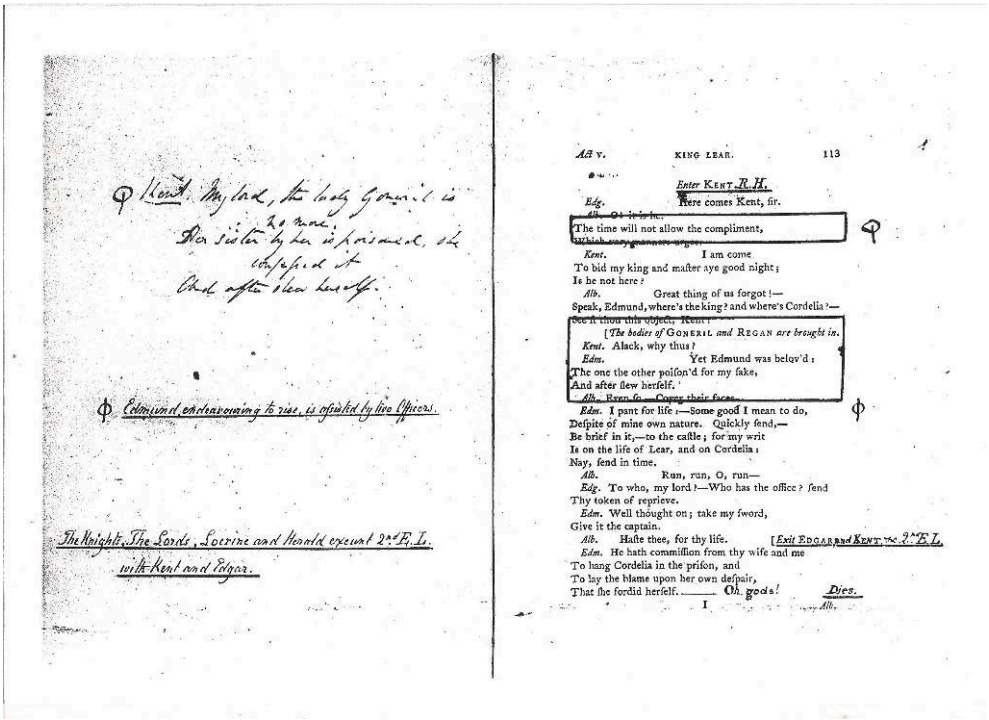

Fig. 8. The death of Edmund in Macready's 1834 reconstruction of *King Lear* (Bodleian Library, Oxford)

31 I am not entirely certain that 19th-century British stage history can be, could be, or could have been treated otherwise than a succession of prominent actors' managements, even well before the age of the "director's theatre". However, Richard Schoch's sentence sheds light on this British theatrical phenomenon that played such a crucial role in shaping Shakespeare's British and even international reception. The eras Schoch called prominent managements, like Garrick's or Macready's one, were prominent due to the charisma, taste, experience, interpretation and effective marketing, and occasionally, a bit of creative plagiarism, of the 19th-century star actor – on whom, more precisely, on whose annotated performance texts Shakespeare's afterlife depended. In an age that lacked any chance of recording performances, these talented stars successfully eternalized their ephemeral art, their iconic gestures and emphases, their dramaturgy and interpretation, in their Shakespearean performance texts.

"Curtain Slow"[66]

32 Even if promptbooks are "not infallible guides to what actually happens on stage", as Sprague[67] warns, and even if promptbooks do not always use the best critical editions of Shakespeare available at the time, the wide range of functions they fulfilled make them an invaluable and unique part of British theatre history. It is not their texts in the first place that makes them interesting for later generations, not even their theoretical potential to reconstruct a historical theatre night. Rather, their sheer presence in the print culture, their being on the verge between elite and popular culture and their ability to share and pass on theatrical knowledge from one generation to the other that renders them worthy of our attention.

33 Originally created by the leading actor to aid the performance of the fellow actors and the technical crew, and also to harmonize the preparation between the guest star and the host company on a tour, performance texts gained extra prominence by becoming available in print. The so-called acting editions not only preserved for us a part of an otherwise ephemeral production, but also conserved actors' interpretation of Shakespeare, conserved acting and preparation methods, guarded costume and scenery ideas, spilt the tea about the highlights of a show in a particular period, conveyed the images of the actors' gestures and emotions, shaped spectating practices, enabled novices to study a role, standardized what was to be seen on stage, marketed a production, authorised a company to play a particular version, or the opposite, attract the less creative to steal, imitate, reverberate an acting edition version. In short, they effectively disseminated Shakespearean ideas in the world of popular culture, lent themselves as an attainable recipe for success to keep Shakespeare on the stage. So "the power of vast imaginings"[68] effectively reached spectators from actors through their promptbooks and acting copies.

NOTES

1. Macready's *Reminiscences*, ed. Sir Frederick Pollock Bart, 2 vol. London, Macmillan, 1875, vol. 1, p. 207.

2. Richard W. Schoch, Review essay. Fiona Ritchie, Peter Sabor, eds., *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century*, Gail Marshall, ed., *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century*, Stuart Sillars, « Shakespeare, Time and the Victorians: A Pictorial Exploration », *Shakespeare Quarterly* 65.1, Spring, 2014, 74-78, p. 77. (accessible online at https://doi.org/10.1353/shq.2014.0005, last accessed May 20, 2020).

3. Usual statement on the frontispiece of acting editions, e.g. *Clarisse, or the Merchant's Daughter, a drama in three acts, as performed at the Theatre Royal Adelphi, correctly printed from the prompter's copy, edited by B. Webster, Comedian, Member of the Dramatic Authors' Society, To be had at the theatre*, London, Webster & Co., no date.

4. Alan S. Downer, *The Eminent Tragedian: William Charles Macready*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1966.

5. Gabriella Reuss, "The Genesis of Macready's Mythical *Lear*: the New Tragic *Lear*, according to his 1834 Promptbook", *Shakespeare en devenir – Les Cahiers de La Licorne*, 9, 2015 (accessible online at http://shakespeare.edel.univ-poitiers.fr/index.php?id=839, last accessed May 20, 2020).
6. Handwritten stage instruction in Macready's 1834 promptbook (William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. George Steevens, London, Harding, 1798) to indicate the beginning of the production (no page number).
7. Macready's 1834 promptbook. It is an interleaved copy in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Arch. H. e. 68). Macready used it for performance five times in 1834 and once in 1835. The playbill in the Bodleian announces the show for May 21st but it was postponed according to Macready's *Diary* until May 23, Drury Lane Theatre, London. The May 26 and June 2 performances took place in Covent Garden Theatre, London. Macready toured with the production in Richmond August 29, it was announced and rehearsed for September 13 in Bristol but was cancelled due to Macready's illness, and was performed in Dublin, November 17. The last performance of this text was in Bath, January 17, 1835.
8. Charles H. Shattuck, *The Shakespeare Promptbooks. A Descriptive Catalogue*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1965.
9. In my article, "Veritas filia temporis or Shakespeare unveiled? Macready's restoration of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in 1834", *The AnaChronist*, 2000, Budapest: ELTE, 88-101, accessible online at http://seas3.elte.hu/anachronist/2000Reuss.htm, last accessed May 20, 2020, I give a full description of the volume. In another study I focused on Macready's European context: "The nineteenth-century theatres of Gábor Egressy and William Charles Macready", *The AnaChronist*, 2002, Budapest: ELTE, 129-150, accessible online at http://seas3.elte.hu/anachronist/2002Reuss.htm, last accessed May 20, 2020.
10. See Gabriella Reuss, "The Genesis of Macready's Mythical *Lear*: the New Tragic *Lear*, according to his 1834 Promptbook", *Shakespeare en devenir*, 9, 2015, n.p.
11. Handwritten stage instruction in Macready's 1834 promptbook, p. 2.
12. Macready's Letter to Mrs Pollock in 1864, Macready's *Reminiscences, op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 462: "You are quite correct in the assertion, that Tate's *King Lear* was the only acting copy from the date of its production until the restoration of Shakespeare's tragedy at Covent Garden in 1838."
13. John Forster, "*King Lear*, 'as Shakespeare Wrote It'", *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. May, 1834, vol. 2, p. 220.
14. Charles Macready, *The Diaries of Macready*, 2 vols, ed. William Toynbee, New York, Putnam & Sons, 1912, vol. I, entry for May 31st, 1834, p. 146.
15. Macready's Letter to Mrs Pollock, loc. cit.
16. Macready's promptbook, 1834, p. 3.
17. Péter Dávidházi, "Redefining Knowledge: An Epistemological Shift in Shakespeare Studies", *Shakespeare Survey*, 2013, 166-176, p. 167. (Accessible online at https://doi.org/10.1017/SSO9781107300699.012 last accessed May 20, 2020.)
18. Russell Jackson, "Shakespeare their contemporary", *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Gail Marshall, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 76-95.
19. Richard Schoch, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
20. See actor-managers' textual rearrangements for the Curse in Bratton's compilation of acting copies (*King Lear*, Plays in Performance series, Bristol, Bristol Classical Press, 1987. Bratton consulted exclusively with "their personally prepared editions of the play, published at the time they [the actor-editors] performed".)
21. Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 170-173, p. 238.
22. See for instance the frontispiece of *Clarisse or the Merchant's Daughter* (1845) by Edward Stirling "To be had at the theatre", and at several bookshops: "Messrs. Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper;

William Strange, Paternoster Row; Wiselkart, Suffolk Street, Dublin, and all booksellers", n° 121 in Webster's Acting National Drama series, London, Webster & Co., 1845.

23. Printed label in Macready's promptbook, 1834, inner frontispiece.

24. Michael Dobson, "What is a promptbook?" a Folger Shakespeare Library video (Adam Matthews Digital, 2020) accessible online at http://www.shakespeareinperformance.amdigital.co.uk/Introduction/PromptBook, last accessed May 20, 2020.

25. William Charles Macready's *King John*: a facsimile prompt-book, ed. Charles H. Shattuck, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1962.

26. In the illustration of an acting copy (Folger Shakespeare Library, Oth 46, not in Shattuck) in Edwin Forrest's book Edwin Booth as Iago in 1883 appears in the same costume as Kean did as Iago in 1823: in a "light drab-coloured jacket with hanging sleeves".

27. Edwin Forrest's 1878 promptbook of *Othello* (Folger Shakespeare Library, Oth 41, Shattuck code: OTH 47) prints two earlier casts of *Othello*: one from 1845 when Mr Scott played Othello, while the other is from as early as 1823 and features Edmund Kean in the title role – as if to authenticate the text by the previous productions. The costumes (which might have belonged to Kean) are given below the cast.

28. Clarisse or the Merchant's Daughter (1845) by Edward Stirling was so popular that the author soon turned it into a romance. (Preface, Clarisse or the Merchant's Daughter, a romance (1847) by Edward Stirling & Thomas Peckett Prest, London: E. Lloyd, 1847 (accessible online at http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_00000003BC16#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=9&xywh=-1035%2C-1%2C4922%2C2324, last accessed May 20, 2020).

29. Tiffany Stern, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

30. J. S. Bratton, *op. cit.*, p. 94-95.

31. Macready's 1834 promptbook, p. 8.

32. Macready, *The Diaries, op. cit.*, vol. I, entry for Sept 18, 1834, p. 180.

33. Gabriella Reuss, "Traditions of Playing and Spectating. The 19th century reception of *Othello* in London and Pest-Buda", Othello *in European Culture*, Shakespeare in European Culture series, ed. Elena Bandín, Francesca Clare Rayner and Laura Campillo, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2021. (forthcoming)

34. Shakespeare, *Othello*, 5.2.107, A Folger Digital Text, ed. by Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine, accessible online at https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/othello/act-5-scene-2/#line-5.2.107 In, for instance, Edwin Forrest's promptbook of *Othello* (Folger Shakespeare Library, Oth 41, Shattuck code: OTH 47) the printed stage instruction says "[Stabs her with his dagger.]", p. 67).

35. See for instance Ralph Richardson with a curved knife at the Old Vic production of *Othello* in 1938 (Desdemona: Curigwen Lewis). More on Desdemona's death in Gabriella Reuss, "Traditions of Playing and Spectating. The 19th century reception of *Othello* in London and Pest-Buda", art. cit.

36. Macready, *The Diaries*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, entry for July 12th, 1834, p. 164.

37. *Idem*, entry for August 10th, 1834, p. 171.

38. *Idem*, entry for July 25th, 1834, p. 167.

39. *Idem*, entry for May 4th, 1834, p. 130.

40. Prior to the performance and the marking of the promptbook, part-based study could have been conducted from what Bratton called a study book or preparation copy, which is not interleaved and rendered rather illegible thanks to the hasty scribblings, once in Macready's possession. Held in the Forster Collection, National Art Library, V&A. (F.48.C.17)

41. Macready, *The Diaries, op. cit.*, vol. I, entry for April 15th, 1836, p. 292.

42. *Idem*, entry for May 10th, 1836, p. 284.

43. *Idem*, entry for Sept 30th, 1834, p. 184.

44. *Idem*, entry for March 19th, 1836 (Exeter), p. 289.
45. *Idem*, entry for November 13th, 1834, p. 204.
46. *Idem*, entry for July 8th, 1836, p. 336.
47. *The Diaries of Macready, op. cit.*, vol. I, entry for July 12th, 1834, p. 164.
48. *Idem*, entry for July 8th, 1836, p. 336.
49. Charles H. Shattuck, ed., William Charles Macready's 'King John.' A facsimile prompt-book, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1962, p. 6-7.
50. *Idem*, p. 5. Among Ellis's actor-clients were Phelps, Forrest, Charles Kean and Vezin. Shattuck claims to have seen these copies.
51. *Ibid.*
52. *Idem, p. 3.*
53. Michael R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre* 1850-1910, Boston, London and Henley; Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, p. 49, footnote 32; he quotes Cole, J. W., *The Life and Theatrical Times of Charles Kean*, 2 vol., London, Richard Bentley, 1859, vol. 2, p. 216.
54. G. C. D. Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 2 vol., New York, 1963 (first published: 1920) vol. 2, p. 200.
55. Macready's *Reminiscences, op. cit*., vol. 1, p. 207
56. Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000. p. 240.
57. Gerard Lairesse, *Groot Schilderboek*, Amsterdam, Hendrick Desbordes, 1712.
58. Aaron Hill, *The Art of Acting. Part I. Deriving Rules from a New Principle, for Touching the Passions in a Natural Manner. An Essay of General Use, to those, who hear, or speak in Public, and to the Practisers of many of the Elegant Arts; As Painters, Sculptors, and Designers: But Adapted, in Particular, to the Stage: With View to quicken the Delight of Audiences, and form a Judgment of the Actors, in their Good, or Bad, Performances,* London: J. Osborne, 1746, accessible online at https://www.actingarchives.it/en/catalogue/consultation/scheda/the-art-of-acting.html, last accessed May 20, 2020.
59. Desmond Shaw Taylor arrived to a similar conclusion ("A performance in the 1720s or 1730s would probably have looked to us much more like an opera than a play", p. 109.) in 1998. "Performance Portraits", *Shakespeare Survey*, 51, 107-124.)
60. Ian Woodfield, *Opera and Drama in Eighteenth Century London. The King's Theatre, Garrick and the Business of Performance*, Cambridge Studies in Opera, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 150.
61. Woodfield, *Op. cit*., "it was in 1741 that the British stage underwent its revolution" p. 109.
62. Stern, *op. cit.*, p. 240.
63. Macready's 1834 promptbook, p. 113.
64. See for instance John Mullan on "Deathbed scenes in fiction" on the British Library's page (2014), accessible online at https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/deathbed-scenes-in-fiction, last accessed 20 May, 2020, also Gabriella Reuss, "'Akarsz-e játszani halált?' Shakespeare-i halálábrázolások a tizenkilencedik századi színpadon és a súgópéldányban" ["Do you want to play - death?" Shakespearean deaths represented on the 19th century stage and in the 19th century promptbook], *Élet és halál Shakespeare életművében. 400 éves jubileum*, ed. Zsolt Almási, Tibor Fabiny, Natália Pikli, Budapest: Reciti, 2017, 173-188, accessible online at https://www.reciti.hu/wp-content/uploads/shakespeare400.pdf, last accessed 20 May, 2020.
65. Macready's promptbook, 1834, p. 113.
66. Macready's 1834 promptbook, p. 116.
67. A. C. Sprague, *Shakespeare and the Actors. The Stage Business in his Plays (1660 1905)*, MA: Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1944, p. 297.
68. Macready's *Reminiscences, op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 207.

ABSTRACTS

It appears to be quite evident, as Richard Schoch somewhat apprehensively pointed out, that academics tend to treat nineteenth-century English stage history in terms of consecutive star actors and their eras of theatre management. But what exactly has made and still makes it convenient for scholars to view almost two centuries of English theatre history as a mere "succession of prominent managements"[2]? This paper intends to consider staging practices, e.g. the mode of acting, and a uniquely British tradition, the publication of performance scripts "printed from the prompter's copy",[3] to find an explanation to the curious phenomenon that Schoch criticized. It appears that the serial publication of performance texts further reinforced the extremely star actor-centered repertoires and theatre managements. For a case study I chose the "eminent tragedian"[4] William Charles Macready's (1793–1873) *Diaries* and his 1834 promptbook, a personally marked copy of *King Lear*, that witnessed the actor's pioneering, successful but soon forgotten 1834 restoration of the tragic ending.[5]

Il semble tout à fait évident que, comme Richard Schoch l'a fait remarquer avec une certaine appréhension, les universitaires ont tendance à traiter l'histoire du théâtre du dix-neuvième siècle comme la succession d'acteurs vedettes et de leurs règnes en tant que directeurs de théâtre. Mais on peut se demander ce qui a rendu et rend toujours commode pour les spécialistes d'envisager quasiment deux siècles d'histoire du théâtre anglais comme la simple « succession de directeurs importants ». Cet article entend prendre en compte les pratiques de mise en scène (c'est-à-dire la manière de jouer) ainsi qu'une tradition spécifiquement britannique qui consiste à publier les scripts de représentations théâtrales « imprimés à partir de l'exemplaire du souffleur », pour trouver une explication au phénomène curieux que Schoch critiquait. Il apparaît que la publication en série des textes de représentations a encore plus renforcé des répertoires et des directions de théâtre centrés sur des acteurs vedettes. J'ai choisi d'étudier le cas de cet « éminent tragédien » que fut William Charles Macready (1793-1873) à travers son journal (*Diaries*) et son livret de souffleur (1834), un exemplaire de *King Lear* annoté de sa main, qui porte témoignage de la manière tout à fait originale et réussie (mais vite oubliée) avec laquelle, en 1834, il a rétabli la fin tragique de cette pièce.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Edition pour acteurs, tradition de jeu, King Lear, Macready William Charles, Othello, livret du souffleur, Schoch Richard, Shakespeare William, Shattuck Charles H., Stern Tiffany, mors bona, opera seria
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